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ABSTRACT

This paper examines shyness--its causes and its impact on children--and presents several strategies based on social learning theory for parents and teachers to help young children overcome shyness. The paper also describes a personal application of these strategies on a young girl. The strategies presented for parents and teachers are: (1) tell children about times you acted bashful; (2) explain to children how they will benefit from behaving in an outgoing manner; (3) show empathy when children feel afraid to interact; (4) prevent labeling of children as "shy"; (5) set goals for more outgoing behavior and measure progress; (6) set a model of outgoing behavior; (7) gradually expose children to unfamiliar settings and people; (8) prompt children to interact with others; (9) reward children for outgoing behavior; (10) praise others' outgoing behavior in the presence of shy children; (11) help children practice interacting with others; (12) pair each shy child with another child in each important setting; (13) read with children books about individuals who overcome shyness or fears; (14) eliminate or reduce the impact of teasing from other children; (15) teach children to identify and verbally express their emotions; (16) coordinate efforts with those of other relevant adults; (17) read more about shyness and learn additional strategies; and (18) consult a guidance counselor or psychologist. Contains 36 references. (KB)

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HELPING YOUNG CHILDREN OVERCOME SHYNESS

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR: John Malouff, Ph.D., J.D.

The information and suggestions in this document are based on my training and experience as a clinical psychologist, my experience as an associate professor of psychology at Nova Southeastern University in Ft. Lauderdale, my experience as a father of a once shy child, an empirically supported theory of human behavior called social learning theory (Bandura, 1986), and a comprehensive review of research findings and suggestions published by shyness experts (see Bibliography). You can reach me at malouffj@polaris.acast.nova.edu.

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WHAT SHYNESS IS AND ISN'T

Shyness involves anxiety and behavioral inhibition in social situations (Leary, 1986). It occurs most frequently in situations that are novel or suggest evaluation of the person or situations where the person is conspicuous or others are intrusive (Buss, 1986; Crozier, 1986). Although all children

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may experience shyness sometimes, some children experience shyness to a debilitating degree. This document is about is about those children.

Young shy children often show an apparent eagerness to observe others combined with a reluctance to speak to or join the others (Asendorpf, 1993). For example, shy children may remain silent around unfamiliar others, even when spoken to. Shy children may refuse to enter a new setting such as a classroom without being accompanied by a parent. Shy children may refuse to participate in athletic or dance activities, they may look only at the ground when around unfamiliar individuals, and they may go to great lengths to avoid calling attention to themselves ("Don't whistle, dad; people will look at us").

Shy children want to interact with unfamiliar others but don't because of their fear. A different problem exists when a child simply prefers to be alone (Asendorpf, 1993). These children, who are rare, show little or no interest in observing others and little or no excitement when approached by others.

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WHAT CAUSES SHYNESS

The causes of shyness have not been demonstrated adequately to justify any firm statements on the issue. However, shyness experts identify as likely causes (a) genes predisposing a person to shyness, (b) a less than firm attachment bond between parent and child, (c) poor acquisition of social skills, or (d) parents, siblings, or others harshly and frequently teasing or criticizing a child (Asendorpf, 1993; Sanson, Pedlam, Cann, Prior, & Oberklaid, 1996).

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WHAT'S GOOD ABOUT SHYNESS

Shy children tend to engage in significantly less social misbehavior than other children (Sanson et al., 1996). This may occur because shy children care so much about what others think of them.

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WHAT'S BAD ABOUT SHYNESS

Shyness experts vary in their views about whether childhood shyness leads to mental health problems later. However, the practical and emotional problems caused by shyness are apparent. As a practical matter, shy children obtain less practice of social skills and develop fewer friends. They tend to avoid activities, such as sports, drama, and debate, that would put them in the limelight. Shy children tend to be perceived as shy, unfriendly, and untalented, and they tend to feel lonely and have low self-esteem (Jones & Carpenter, 1986). Shy adults tend to have smaller social networks and to feel less satisfied than others with their social support networks (Jones & Carpenter, 1986). I have known shy college students who never graduate because they fear taking a public speaking class.

Many shy individuals think of their shyness as a significant problem that hinders them in myriad ways (Zimbardo, 1986). Fortunately, some individuals act less shy as they become older (Zimbardo, 1986). However, even these individuals may regret their prior shyness, thinking sadly

of the social opportunities they missed.

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WHAT PARENTS AND TEACHERS CAN DO TO HELP CHILDREN OVERCOME SHYNESS

There are many strategies that can be used to help children overcome shyness. Some strategies may be more effective with some children than with others. Some children may benefit substantially from regular application of a few of the strategies listed below. Other children may need many more strategies applied. I suggest trying as many strategies as possible for at least a month and continuing with those that seem promising with a particular child. Many of the strategies are worth continuing indefinitely because they are just principles of good parenting.

The strategies below are listed in order of logical application. After an explanation of the strategy, you will see a section labeled "Our Application." In that section I will describe how my wife, Nicola Schutte, Ph.D., and I applied the strategy to my four-year-old daughter, Elizabeth. For the full story of Elizabeth and how she overcame shyness with our help, see Elizabeth.

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1. Tell the children about times when you acted bashful

Once shy children start feeling bad about being shy, they may enter a downward spiral of becoming less and less confident and having lower and lower self-esteem. Parents can help counter this unfortunate effect of shyness by disclosing the times when they acted shy themselves (Zimbardo, 1981, p. 166). Because children often view parents as powerful, god-like figures, the children will tend to feel better about their own shy behavior. If the parents then talk about how they became more outgoing (e.g. by setting a goal of acting more outgoing and pursuing it), the children will have a powerful model to follow. The beauty of using personal coping anecdotes to lead children is that there is not much for the children to resist. No one is telling them to do anything. The parents are just describing what they did that worked.

Our Application: I told Elizabeth about how I was afraid to talk to girls when I was a young teen and about how I was afraid to give speeches in class. I added that fortunately I got over those fears or I might never have become a professor and might never have married Elizabeth's mother. I don't know what effect, if any, that had, but I do know that Elizabeth often asks me to tell her about my childhood, indicating great interest.

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2. Explain to the children how they will benefit from acting outgoing

Children who expect to benefit from a behavior tend to engage in the behavior (Pear & Martin, 1996, p. 111). The most convincing way for parents to tell children the value of acting outgoing is by giving personal examples, e.g., "To become a teacher I had to overcome my shyness because teaching requires a person to talk to new people almost every day." The parents can then explain the more immediate value to the child of outgoing behavior, such as making more friends, having more fun, and enjoying school and other social activities more. Our Application: I told Elizabeth that she would make more friends and have more fun if she spoke to other kids. She obviously wanted to play with other kids, but she lacked the confidence.

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3. Show empathy when the children feel afraid to interact

One way to help children begin to control their fear of certain social situations is to show empathy when they feel afraid to interact with others. So, if a child refuses out of shyness to go out on a field for soccer practice, a parent might say, "I get the sense you feel worried [self-conscious, shy, afraid] about going out there. I feel worried sometimes too – when I'm not sure what to do and other people are watching me." By showing empathy, a parent helps the child feel understood and accepted and also helps the child identify and talk about his or her emotions and start searching for a way to control them. See Rogers (1980, p. 156). Our Application: I showed empathy at times when Elizabeth felt afraid – of anything. Most memorably, I told her once when she felt afraid of going to her first swimming lesson that I could tell that she felt afraid and that I too had felt afraid about swimming lessons. As soon as she heard that, she said, "I'll be brave," and she walked over to the pool. I also showed empathy when she entered a new situation, such as watching a child karate class. I said something along the lines of, " I can tell you feel excited – even nervous – about being here; I feel excited too."

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4. Prevent labeling of the children as "shy"

When talking with others, parents sometimes say in front of a child that he or she is shy. Big mistake! Children who are told that they are shy tend to start thinking of themselves as shy and then fulfill the role, without making any effort to change. Wise parents never hang a negative label on their children. See Wicks-Nelson & Israel (1997, p. 98) regarding the risks of labeling.

Because shy behavior is so obvious in children, other children and adults often comment on it, saying something like, "Oh, she's shy." How do parents best handle statements by others that the child "is shy"? Try disagreeing in a good-natured way (with a smile) and offering a non-labeling alternative explanation such as that the child sometimes takes a while to warm up.

What do parents say then when their child fails out of shyness to respond to a question from someone else? There are many options. One is to prompt the child to speak. If that fails, just go on with the conversation.

Our Application: Because Elizabeth acted shy around unfamiliar people, adults often mentioned in front of her that she was "shy." I never agreed with anyone who described Elizabeth as shy in her presence. Instead, I usually said something like this: "Actually, she's quite outgoing around people she knows well." To further counter those comments, I told her how bold or outgoing she was whenever she did anything in the least bit bold or outgoing. So when she climbed a wall and jumped off, I told her she was "bold." When Elizabeth talked to unfamiliar people, I told her she was outgoing.

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5. Set goals for more outgoing behavior and measure progress

A good deal of research supports the value of goal setting in improving performance of various

types (Locke, 1996). The most useful goals are those that are measurable (quantifiable), challenging yet realistic, and are set with the involvement of the person whose performance (behavior) is in question. For many shy children, a realistic, challenging goal is to say at least one word to one new person every day. Other possibly appropriate goals might include speaking in front of a whole class, joining (even silently) in play with another child, or asking a teacher a question. Parents can help children see their progress by posting a chart at home that shows a star or a smile for each day the child achieved the goal. Children usually like putting up the sticker themselves.

Our Application: At the very start of the training program I set a goal for Elizabeth to talk with a new person every day. At the end of the day and often also in mid-day, I talked with Elizabeth about how many people she had talked to for the first time that day. I kept track of the results for several weeks until the behavior of speaking to unfamiliar people became fairly regular.

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6. Set a model of outgoing behavior

Children learn a great deal through observing the behavior of parents and others (Bandura, 1984). In fact, count on children to do more what a parent does than what a parent suggests. Parents who never invite anyone over to the house, who never take phone calls, and who never speak to strangers may tend to have shy or nonsocial children. Parents who want their children to act more outgoing are wise to monitor their own behavior and act outgoing whenever possible in front of the children. Invite friends and family members over, visit neighbors, and speak to pleasant looking strangers in grocery store lines. Most importantly, talk with children the age of your child -- join them in their games. If your child won't speak or join in, don't worry – you're setting a model that shows the acting outgoing is something you do with kids and that the kids usually respond well. You're also showing your child how to interact with others. If your child becomes agitated at your behavior (because of embarrassment), show empathy and end the interaction in a socially skilled way. But repeat that type of interaction again and again, gradually increasing the lengths of the interactions over a course of days or weeks.

Our Application: I set a model of outgoing behavior. I had never been one to speak to strangers, but that changed in this program. I spoke to adults and children in stores and on playgrounds. Also, my wife and I invited more friends to our house.

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7. Expose the children to unfamiliar settings and people

The more practice shy children get interacting with unfamiliar people the faster the shyness will decrease. However, the exposure will work best if it is gradual (Sarafino, 1086, p. 110). Whenever possible, let the child get used to the setting and people before you push the child to interact. Help the child develop confidence in one new setting at a time, little by little. The setting could be a favorite yogurt shop where the child gradually begins to place his or her own order. The setting could be a neighborhood playground where the child eventually asks an often seen child what his name is. The key is for the shy child to visit the setting and, if possible, certain individuals, repeatedly, gradually acting more and more outgoing.

Expose the child to as many types of settings and people as possible. Make sure to expose shy

children frequently to younger children. As Zimbardo and Radl (1981) and Honig (1987) noted, some shy children show more confidence in interacting with younger children. Also, expose shy children at home to new people who are invited over. At home is where shy children tend to feel most confident.

Our Application: I took Elizabeth to more new places than ever, including child-activity programs in libraries and bookstores. I increased efforts to arrange play dates with other children. I took Elizabeth with me to work at times, and I invited neighbor children and parents to the house

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8. Prompt the children to interact with others

Prompt shy children to speak, join, or interact with others whenever there is any chance that the children will do so. Specific prompts work best (Martin & Pear, 1996, p. 37), e.g. "Tell her your name is Margaret" or "say good-bye." If the child won't say anything to a person, try prompting the child to wave hello or good-bye. A wave is a step in the right direction. Another good strategy, which might be called triangulation, involves speaking to another child, then asking your child what he or she thinks about something relating to the conversation. For example:

Parent to unfamiliar child: "I like your 'Elmo' shoes. Parent to own child: "Do you like them? Don't you have a talking Elmo? What does it say?"

Be careful not to push a shy child too hard. You could just create more resistance (Honig, 1987). Go for gradual improvement, realizing that the child will show improvement some days and not others. Our Application: I encouraged Elizabeth to talk with or play with other children, even unfamiliar children. One way I did this was to stay with her for about ten minutes each day I took her to pre-K school. I sat with her at a table and talked with the closest other child. I then included Elizabeth in the conversation. For instance, if I saw a child drawing a picture of a dinosaur, I said to Elizabeth, "You like dinosaurs too, don't you? What's your favorite one?" I kept alternating talking to the other child and Elizabeth. At first, Elizabeth spoke without looking at the other child, but I felt successful because she spoke loud enough for the other child to hear. As the weeks passed Elizabeth started looking at the other child while speaking.

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9. Reward the children for outgoing behavior

Expected rewards can serve as very powerful motivators (Bandura, 1986, p. 229). Whenever a shy child acts outgoing, praise the child. Praise even slight improvements in outgoingness. If the child achieves a set daily goal for acting outgoing, praise the child and celebrate with some special (rare and highly desired) food or activity. Tell the children in advance what the special treat will be for acting outgoing in some specific way.

Our Application: I rewarded Elizabeth for acting outgoing. Whenever she spoke with an unfamiliar person I praised her, either right then or soon after. Each day Elizabeth talked for the first time with a person, I gave her a serving of sweetened cranberries (they look like raisins). I chose cranberries because Elizabeth liked them and never was served them otherwise. Hence, they seemed a real treat. Over the course of a year since the program began, Elizabeth has never gotten tired of them. My wife likewise praised Elizabeth for outgoing behavior. .

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10. Praise others' outgoing behavior in the presence of the children

By positively commenting on the outgoing behavior of others, a parent can help a shy child come to value outgoing behavior while learning the specifics of the behavior. See Bandura (1986, pp. 284-286) regarding the principle involved, which is called "vicarious reward." For instance, a parent might say to her child, "I like the way that boy came up to us and asked us our names" or might directly compliment the other child in the presence of the shy child. The comment shows positive regard for a specific behavior that the parent's child could emulate. Do not, however, add any comment such as, "Why can't you act like that?"

Our Application: I commented positively on the outgoing behavior of people Elizabeth and I encountered. If an unfamiliar child said hello to us, I said something like, "What a friendly child. I like it when people say hello."

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11. Help the children practice interacting with others

Some shy children do not know what to say in certain situations, such as when they meet a new child. Parents can help the shy children by encouraging them to practice the social skill. One effective way to help children improve a social skill is to encourage them to rehearse (role play) it (Miltenberger, 1997, p. 236). Parents and children can act out the roles themselves or use puppets. For instance:

Puppet 1: "What's your name?" Puppet 2: "Ben." Puppet 1: "My name is Marie. What are you doing?" Puppet 2: "Making [sand] cakes." Puppet 1: "I can do that too [starts making a cake].'

Our Application: My wife and I role played with Elizabeth how to join a group. For instance, we practiced saying in a pleasant tone things such as "What are you doing?" and "I can swing myself too." Sometimes we used puppets and made up a story, and sometimes Elizabeth just practiced as herself.

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12. Pair each shy child with another child in each important setting

A shy child who makes even one friend in a new setting will feel much more comfortable and will eventually interact more with other children. Parents and teachers can help facilitate the process of making a friend by asking two children to play together [or be friends] today and then talking with both of them about their common interests or activities. The adult can also give the two children tasks to accomplish together, such as putting out supplies or putting a puzzle together (Honig, 1987). Choose a willing and able child for the friend – not someone who already has a bosom buddy in the setting.

Our Application: My wife and I complimented Elizabeth's teacher for efforts to pair Elizabeth with a specific other child in class. This pairing worked well. Later, when Elizabeth showed resistance about going to a summer day camp, I told her how I felt nervous when I moved and

went to a new school. I added that I felt OK once I made my first friend. Elizabeth went to the camp and made a new friend within a day or so. When Elizabeth joined a soccer team I talked immediately with one of the few other girls on the team, a bashful girl who did not respond. I persisted at one practice after an another, talking also with the girl's mother. Within two weeks the two girls became pals.

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13. Read books with the children about individuals who overcome shyness or fears

Shy children can benefit from reading books about children who overcome shyness or fears (Sarafino, 1986, p. 192). The following books about shy kids are worth buying or obtaining from a library:

Cooney, N. C. (1993). Chatterbox Jamie. A shy boy won't speak at first at nursery school. Slowly he comes out of his shell and speaks to others there.

Hazen, B.S. (1982). Very shy. New York: Human Sciences Press. The story of a shy girl who follows the advice of her parents about how to act more outgoing. She eliminates self-defeating thoughts such as "If I speak I might sound dumb,", she pushes herself to speak even if she feel afraid, she practices in front of a mirror, and then she speaks to a new, shy boy.

Keller, B. (1975). Fiona's bee. New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan. Fiona acts bashful when she moves to a new house, but she makes friends when she helps a bee.

Krasilovsky, P. (1970). The shy little girl. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. A girl too shy to speak up in class or join in school games makes a friend at school and then becomes more outgoing in the classroom and on the playground.

Skorpen, L. M. (1971). Plenty for three. New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan. A bashful girl declines an invitation to play with two neighbor girls. She feels lonely while they have fun. The girls invite her again, and she joins them and has fun.

Zolotow, C. (1963). A tiger called Thomas. New York: Lathrop, Lee & Shepard. A shy boy moves to a new home and meets people when he goes trick-or-treating.

McCully, E. A. (1991). Speak up, Blanche. New York: HarperCollins. A shy lamb want to become an actress, but she doesn't speak loud enough. However, she discovers a talent for painting stage sets and finally speaks up.

Other books have value because they show a child or adult overcoming fears:

Blegvod, L. (1985). Anna Banana and me. New York: Atheneum. Anna acts confident and brave, and her timid female friend becomes brave too.

Little, J. (1991). Jess was the brave one. Toronto: Penguin. A timid girl has a brave younger sister. However, when bigger kids mistreat the younger sister, the older sister boldly stands up to them.

Martin, C. L. G. (1991). Three brave women. New York: Macmilan. A girl, her mom, and

grandma overcome their fear of spiders together.

Williams, L. (1986). The little old woman who wasn't afraid of anything. New York: HarperCollins. An old woman followed by a bizarre creature shows no fear and instead helps the creature become a scarecrow.

Wolstein, D. (1977). The red lion: A tale of ancient Persia. New York: Crowell. A young prince flees when he is asked to prove his courage by fighting the Red Lion. The prince encounters lions wherever he goes, and he learns that it is fear more than the lion that endangers him. In the end, he faces the Red Lion.

When reading any of these books, a parent can have the most impact by talking with the child about the lesson of the story and how it applies to each of their lives.

Our Application: My wife and I read Elizabeth every children's book I could find relating to shyness. I always praised the character who overcame shyness. I especially liked "Very Shy" by Hazen.

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14. Eliminate teasing of the children or reduce the impact

Social rejection and teasing can help produce shy behavior. So, do not tease your child or allow anyone else to. If necessary, remove your child from the presence of rejecting or teasing children (Asendorpf, 1993). Also, discuss with your children the expression "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me" and describe teasing you have experienced. Your self-disclosure will help the child feel less bad about being teased.

Our Application: I used to tease Elizabeth occasionally, but now I avoid teasing. Even after making great progress in overcoming shyness, she still responds negatively to teasing of any sort. Fortunately, she experiences little teasing from anyone else. When she tells me that another child teased her at school, I show empathy and encourage her to speak up for herself, saying, "It's not good manners to tease."

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15. Teach the children to identify and to verbally express their emotions

Shy children can best start to control their feelings of embarrassment and fear when the children identify and talk about the feelings. To help the children develop these skills, talk about your emotions in front of the children. For instance, say, " I feel scared when you climb up there" or "I feel sad when I think about homeless children." Praise the children when they talk about their emotions. Play emotions charades or other games that help teach children to identify and express their emotions (Malouff & Schutte,1998).

Our Application: My wife and I taught Elizabeth to talk about her emotions. We set a model by talking about our emotions. We also commented often on her apparent emotion or asked her what emotion she was experiencing. Over time she started saying spontaneously that she felt "mad" or "embarrassed." She even said once that the Beatles looked "proud" in one of their movies.

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16. Coordinate your efforts with those of other relevant adults

Efforts to help a child become more outgoing will produce more improvement if all the caretakers and teachers of the child apply regularly the methods mentioned in this list. These other individuals, especially teachers, can make major contributions to the effort merely by praising the child for more outgoing behavior and by helping the child make friends with another child in every setting the child frequents (e.g. school, day care, the T-ball team). In enlisting the help of these individuals, realize that they may have their own ideas about how to accomplish the goal. Go along with them as much as possible, and they will likely cooperate with you.

Our Application: My wife and I coordinated efforts to help Elizabeth become more outgoing. We also talked with her teachers, who often asked Elizabeth to be a "friend" to one specific child or another that day at school.

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17. Read more about shyness and learn additional strategies for parents and teachers

For parents, the Honig (1987) article, the Sarafino (1986) the Zimbardo (1981) books, and the web site of Hyson & Van Trieste (1987) mentioned in the bibliography contain a wealth of strategies beyond those mentioned here. Teachers wishing to help shy students will find especially helpful the web site of Brophy (1996) and the articles of Bokhorst (1995), Bullock (1993), Biemer (1983), and Evans (1992), as well as the shyness-related interventions described in the book of Cohen & Fish (1993, p. 396 et seq.) See generally the bibliography at the end of this article.

Our Application: I read everything I could find about shyness. The most potentially useful new idea I found was to help the child decenter, i.e. focus on something other than himself or herself (Alden & Cappe, 1986). I also have taken the suggestion of experts on childhood fears e.g. Sarafino, 1986, p. 193) and started teaching Elizabeth to calm herself through deep breathing and distraction. So far this calming strategy has proven most valuable in dealing with pain.

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18. Consult a guidance counselor or psychologist

If you find it difficult to apply the methods contained in this set of recommendations, or if the methods don't work for your child, contact a guidance counselor at your child's school or consult a psychologist who provides counseling to children and families. To find a highly qualified psychologist, consult your pediatrician or call local universities and ask if the university itself or any psychology professors privately provide any counseling for shy children.

Our Application: Fortunately, Elizabeth has become so outgoing over the past year that we will not have to apply this strategy.

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ELIZABETH: A CHILD OVERCOMES SHYNESS

When my daughter entered pre-kindergarten I expected her to have fun and learn. She talked and talked at home, loved books, and said she was eager to start school. I didn't expect her to refuse to speak to anyone there, but that's what she did – for the entire fall.

I didn't become aware of the problem until Elizabeth's teacher asked me if Elizabeth might have a hearing problem. I said no and asked what made her wonder. She said that Elizabeth didn't respond to questions. The next bad sign was the report of the speech-language screening that all the children received that fall. Elizabeth had a recommendation for further evaluation of speech because she did not speak during the evaluation. She did raise her hand appropriately for the hearing test and passed it.

I assumed that Elizabeth just needed some time to adjust to being in a school-like setting. She had never participated classes or daycare before. Instead, she had stayed home with a nanny and spent time with her mother and me. She had had few interactions with other children because none lived near us.

The seriousness of Elizabeth's shyness problem hit home in January when she went for a required screening interview for acceptance into a private school for the next year. Several other parents and children were present too in a waiting area. An administrator told us all that the children were to go into another room without parents for the screening. All the children except Elizabeth went. She refused, clinging to me. An administrator and I tried unsuccessfully for half an hour to persuade her. No dice. We went home to tell her momma that Elizabeth would not be attending that school next year. That same day I started developing an intervention program to help Elizabeth become more outgoing In one order or another my wife and I applied all the strategies mentioned in this document.

Soon after my wife and I started the program, Elizabeth started talking to some other children in her class and to some unfamiliar people. Within a few weeks she started talked freely to adults who talked with me. She used the line we had practiced: "My name is Elizabeth, and I'm four years old." Then she talked with girls she met, and finally with with some boys she met.

Over the next few months Elizabeth went to two vacation camps. She acted less shy at the start of each. In June, on the last day of pre-K, the teacher's assistant said hello as Elizabeth entered the classroom. Elizabeth, for the first time all year, responded, saying hello back. The assistant and I yelled and jumped for joy, and then I shouted, "She did it!"

In order to prepare Elizabeth for kindergarten in a new school, we sent her to summer camp at that very school, where she interacted daily with the person who would become her kindergarten teacher. When she started kindergarten, Elizabeth showed no signs of shyness. Weeks later her teacher described Elizabeth as a well behaved child who plays with various children and speaks up in class.

Now half way through kindergarten, Elizabeth says hello to nearly everyone we encounter on walks. When she sees children near her age, she goes over and talks to them and usually ends up playing for at least a while. She sometimes then gives the child a hug – something she last did with a new acquaintance when she was two years old.

I knew Elizabeth had achieved a good level of outgoingness when she agreed to join a soccer team and went for tryouts. She waited 30 minutes for her chance to kick a ball through orange cones on her way to kicking it into a goal. Although she was just a beginner, she never hesitated. She kicked

and kicked all the way to the goal – in front of 200 people watching only her. I smiled a parent's smile of joy to see her perform so confidently.

At her first soccer practice Elizabeth made friends with a quiet little girl. I encouraged Elizabeth to talk also with a boy who declined to speak or participate in drills. Instead, he looked at the ground. Somehow, he managed always to keep away from me and Elizabeth – and everyone else. I talked with his father, who said the boy acted the same way in karate class. After a few weeks he and his father stopped coming. That's when I felt obliged to create this site in the hope that parents and teachers will use it to help children overcome their shyness.

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BILBLIOGRAPHY (INCLUDING WEB SITES) (click for children's books relating to shyness)

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IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS

Feel free to contact me if you have questions or comments about this document. I am interested in the experiences of others in helping children overcome shyness, so don't hesitate to tell me whether the strategies mentioned here work for you. Also, if you have experiences indicating that other strategies work well, let me know. You can reach me at malouffj@polaris.acast.nova.edu.

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